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Color top
eleven tip sheet

Why color is intentional

As marketers, we spend a lot of time wordsmithing messages. How much strategic effort do we invest in our choice of color for our marketing communications? Turns out, we could get a lot more **bang!** for our marketing dollars if we did.

Asset Communications partner **Diane Roggow**, a color psychologist and branding expert, says color has a strong psychological – and even a physical – impact on people. “Studies show that color is the first thing people register,” she says. “It has a powerful impact on our memory and our decisions to buy everything from cars to apparel,” she adds. Echoing observations made by *Blink* author Malcolm Gladwell – that we’re heavily influenced by first impressions and make critical judgments in a matter of seconds – Roggow suggests color is one of the visual information elements that register in those first few moments.

Today, in addition to running her own firm, she is a member of the international Color Marketing Group (CMG) – the leading organization of color design professionals whose mission is to forecast color trends. Their work influences color choices across the consumer and commercial spectrum.

So, what is color?

For our answer, we searched out a logical choice: the Crayola Company – the inventors of colored crayons with U.S. roots dating back to 1864. They define color as **the aspect of things that is caused by differing qualities of light being reflected or emitted by them.**¹ Even though ancient scientists wrote about the nature of light and color, it was not until the late 1600s when Isaac Newton discovered that light was the source of color. He was the first to understand the rainbow and the one who gave us the framework for what we now refer to as the color wheel. But color is so much more than that. Like words and imagery, color is an additional source of information.



The 64-color assortment of Crayola® crayons – with a built-in sharpener – debuted in 1958.

WHAT COLOR TRENDS WILL WE SEE IN 2010?

- Red** Reds are strong ; bright and clean with energy and excitement – a clean pop to go with neutrals.
- Orange** A rich, sophisticated color that moves away from earth-based colors to an optimistic orange, seasoned with a touch of gray.
- Yellow** A greener, more natural yellow, softened with gray.
- Green** Optimistic and uplifting, a clear and bright accent green with a slight shift toward blue.
- Blue** A saturated blue with gray influences; rich without being too luxe.
- Beige-Brown** A true chameleon to complement darker hues, it can be either matte or metallic.
- Neutral-Gray** Gray with a touch of purple, drawing inspiration from mineral, concrete and steel.

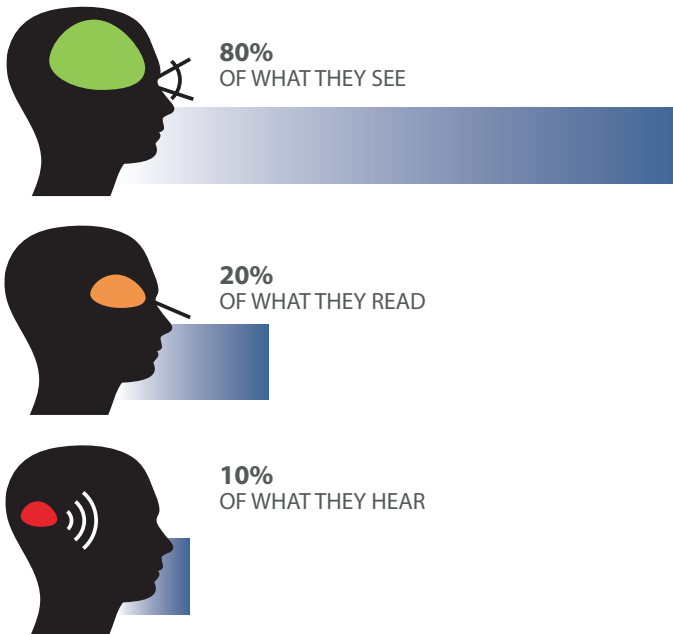
Source: Color Marketing Group - www.colormarketing.org

The art and science of color

Intuitively, we know that color makes our communications more attractive; and, when paired with good graphic design and layout, can make the difference between mediocre and extraordinary communication. But what's behind that intuition? It turns out that color affects human beings on a variety of levels, even changes in our very body chemistry, Roggow explains. “Colors engage, and sometimes repel; they stimulate curiosity and can enflame passions,” she says. Psychological tests have shown that the color yellow, for example, is the first color processed by the brain and research shows that it improves comprehension. **Remember those yellow highlighters from your college days?**

In comparison to the rest of the world , American marketers don't spend nearly enough time or market research considering the implications of color, Roggow says. “Asian and other international markets are far more advanced in their strategic purposing of color choice. The American auto and

How Much Do People Remember?



fashion industries are exceptions, she explains. "Ford Motor Company won't put a new car color out unless 80% of women participating in focus groups express a positive reaction," she says.

As a teachers coach Susan Fitzell, M.Ed. tells educators homework on blue paper comes back more often, and the color green on dry-erase boards supports recall up to 60-70%.² Apparently our emotional reactions associated with color are spontaneous. The reaction, often due to the perception of a color rather than to the color itself, may be positive or negative. Our response to color is not just emotional; it's physiological, too. Roggow explains, "color cones in the human eye send signals along the optic neurons to the brain that are transmitted to the pituitary gland." The color red, for example, stimulates the adrenal medulla, she says, which then secretes adrenaline, causing a state of arousal that can be measured in increased heart rates.

Ask any interior designer about the impact paint color can have on the mood of a room. He or she will tell you that a considerable amount of thought should be given to the color scheme to achieve the effect you're after.

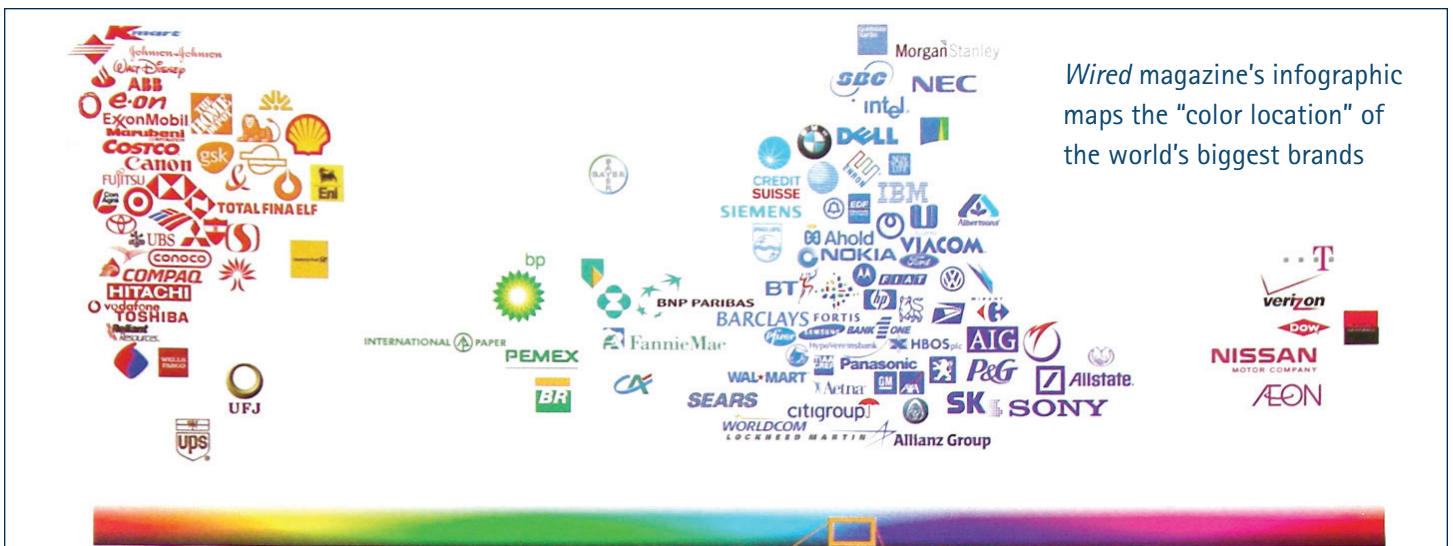
The whole world, as we experience it visually, comes to us through the mystic realm of color.

Our entire being is nourished by it.

This mystic quality of color should likewise find expression in a work of art.

Hans Hofmann,
German-born American Abstract Expressionist Painter,
1880-1966

While new research is uncovering significant findings, part of the problem is that color psychology has been viewed as a soft science, at best. But that, too, is changing. Marketing research indicates over 80% of visual information is related to color. In his often-cited treatise, *The Persuasive Properties of Color*, Ronald Green states color can have a dramatic impact on memory and attention. Other studies suggest approximately 83% of human learning occurs visually, and the remaining 17% through the other senses – 11% through hearing, 3.5% through smell, 1% through taste, and 1.5% through touch.³



Cultural and gender overtones

Roggow reminds us "our reaction to color can be different depending on our age, gender and nationality." Red stimulates the strongest reaction with more cultures than many other colors because of its intensity, passion and ability to evoke a physiological response. In China, for example, red is the color of celebration and good luck; in India, it symbolizes purity and integrity, whereas in South Africa, red is the color of mourning. Roggow advises marketers to be mindful of their target market when selecting colors for marketing communications initiatives. "Marketers should match the attributes of the colors they use with the qualities of their intended message and audience," she adds.

Her advice is confirmed by the research findings of Satyendra Singh, Associate Professor at the University of Winnipeg, Canada. "... Research relating to choice of colors should be conducted and concluded before launching a product, as the wrong color choice can have a negative impact on the image of the product and the company. Global managers need to recognize that the different meanings associated with specific colors may facilitate multi-segment marketing opportunities."⁴

Color and brand identity

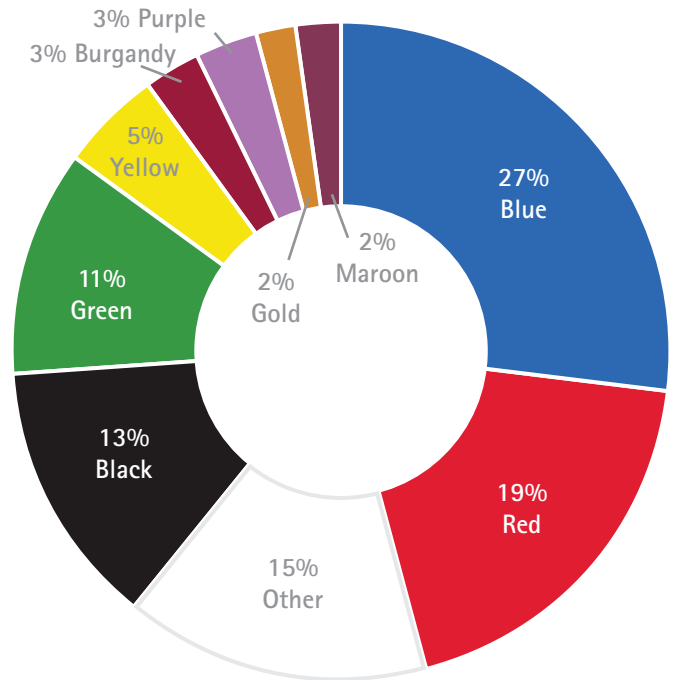
When you think about the intentionality of color, you might think about those delightful, robin-egg-blue gift boxes from Tiffany. Indeed, the company itself describes the power of its image as "no longer merely a color, the shade has made the Tiffany Blue Box® an international icon signifying the excellence of all Tiffany & Co. designs."⁵ Tiffany takes great care to protect this valuable asset; the blue, designated by Pantone as number 1837 – the year Tiffany was founded – is a registered trademark of the company.



Not surprisingly, academic research by the University of Loyola, Maryland, suggests that color increases brand recognition by up to 80%. Perhaps that's why consumer goods giants like Coca Cola, with its trademark red, or Starbuck's and its distinctive kelly green, treat their colors with such reverence.

Color printing experts Xerox, Ricoh and Hewlett-Packard spend a lot of research resources trying to understand and get the upper hand on the power of color. After all, they're in the business of manufacturing and selling color print technology. Geoffrey Woolfe, principal scientist in the Xerox Innovation Group, has developed new methods to manipulate

MOST PROMINENT COLOR IN COMPANY LOGO



- 92% Believe color presents an image of impressive quality
- 90% Feel color can assist in attracting new customers
- 90% Believe customers remember presentations and documents better when color is used
- 84% Think greater consideration is given to color documents
- 83% Believe color makes them appear more successful
- 83% Feel color capabilities enhances employee creativity
- 81% Think color gives them a competitive edge
- 78% Report that color documents are easier to understand
- 76% Believe that the use of color makes their business appear larger to clients

Source: Xerox Corporation; Market research conducted by Xerox Corporation and International Communications Research from February 19, 2003 to March 7, 2003, margin of error of +/- 3.1%.

color using simple language rather than a set of complex mathematical coordinates. "You shouldn't have to be a color expert to make the sky a deeper blue or add a bit of yellow to a sunset," Woolfe says.⁶ His discovery could have far-reaching implications for experts and amateurs alike. In a published case study, office automation company Ricoh Americas Corp. found that, in addition to enhancing aesthetics, highlight color will eliminate the expense of pre-printed forms and can indirectly improve cash flow. Citing InfoTrends, they found that emphasizing important data on an invoice or statement with highlight color can accelerate speed of payment up to 30%.⁷

A special offer for friends of Asset Communications

Asset Communications' creative director, Priscilla Blanchot, agrees that color knowledge is essential to good design and effective communications. She says that color is influential at every level from brand identity systems – including a logo, signage and stationery – to websites, displays, packaging and collateral. If it's not intentional and well-thought-out, it won't work. Too often people don't put enough consideration into the colors that they use. Whether it's a newsletter or a logo, color can significantly enhance your intended audience's experience.

Are your marketing communications signaling the right message?

For a limited time, Asset Communications clients can save 15% on any color assessment service. Whether you'd like a professional to review your corporate palette, or offer guidance on a specific marketing communications piece, you'll benefit from our experience and passion for the power of color. For more information, contact your Asset Communications Account Executive, or email us at cshiebler@assetcommunications.com.

Take the Color IQ Test:

So you think you're pretty good with color? Want to test your mettle? Check out the Color IQ Test at X-Rite's website. X-Rite is the global leader in color science and technology, and the parent company of Pantone.

www.xrite.com/ph_toolframe.aspx?action=coloriq



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¹ <http://www.crayola.com/colorcensus/science/index.cfm>

² www.aimhieducational.com

³ Presenting Effective Presentations with Visual Aids, U.S. Department of Labor; <http://www.osha.gov/doc/outreachtraining/htmlfiles/traintec.html>

⁴ <http://jgroshok.public.iastate.edu/color%20on%20marketing.pdf>

⁵ <http://press.tiffany.com/About/Tiffany/TiffanyBlue.aspx>

⁶ <http://www.xerox.com/innovation/news-stories/color-matching/enus.html>

⁷ http://www.ricoh-usa.com/ppbg/pdf/ric_dmc_casestudy_January102008.pdf

Put color to work – for you!

Top 11 ways to influence yourself and others in five minutes or less



- 1** | Always use a black pen for business correspondence. Business etiquette says black ink is the most formal, professional color for official correspondence.
- 2** | Print employee memos or difficult communication on soothing colored paper, especially light blue. Your audience will be more receptive to your message.
- 3** | Package client communications in a non-white envelope that is consistent with your company brand. The unique look and feel of a colored – or even a translucent or glassine – envelope will create awareness for the client, differentiate your company, and promote affinity based on the color of choice.
- 4** | White space is often used to make a message more prominent. The lack of color is as impactful as its presence. White space also gives the reader's eyes a chance to rest and absorb ideas.
- 5** | Some colors like brown, gold and pink often don't print the way you want them to, and tints can be tricky. Achieving the effects you want also can be costlier.
- 6** | Use primary colors when marketing to children. These vibrant, attention-getting colors also represent warmth, sweetness, trust, reliability and playfulness.
- 7** | One out of 10 people are color blind. The best colors to use in live presentations are blue, green and black. They are softer on the eyes and easier for color-blind people to see.
- 8** | Be "web safe". Macs and PCs render colors differently, as do browsers. Use "web smart" colors to minimize issues.
- 9** | Be careful when using light text on dark backgrounds – not all colors work together. What matters is contrast; white text on a black background is very effective.
- 10** | Color should be used to accentuate messaging by being congruent with content.
- 11** | Orange is a great attention grabber. Although the color orange goes in and out of fashion, it is often underused; your materials will stand out more readily when used effectively.